

## PRESS RELEASE



# The Cleveland Museum of Art

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SPECIAL EXHIBITION FEATURES CERAMIC MASTERPIECES  
June 30 - September 5, 1982

Since Neolithic times, craftsmen all over the world have shaped humble clay into vessels and sculptures of great artistry. From a collection of more than 2000 such objects, the Museum's curatorial staff has selected nearly 170 exceptional works for a special exhibition, The World of Ceramics: Masterpieces from The Cleveland Museum of Art. Jenifer Neils, assistant curator (CMA-CWRU) of ancient art, coordinated the exhibition, a collaborative effort involving nearly every curatorial department in the Museum. The show runs from June 30 through September 5 and is supported in part by a grant from the Ohio Arts Council.

Each object has been selected for its high quality, rarity, and excellent condition, allowing connoisseurs, potters, and generalists alike to appreciate, in the words of Sherman E. Lee, Director of the Museum and initiator of the exhibition, "...the sheer delight inherent in the miraculously thrown or daringly decorated vessel." Intended primarily as an essay in connoisseurship, the show is also an informal survey of the history of ceramics. It brings together for the first time from the Museum collection masterpieces of ceramic art representing many cultures and most major ceramic styles. Earthenware, stoneware, and porcelain, the three basic ceramic wares, take a rich variety of forms: storage jars, tomb sculptures, altarpieces, oil flasks, apothecary bottles, tureens, incense burners, wine cups, and decorative vases, plates, and figurines.

Organized by cultures, and then chronologically within each culture, the exhibition reaches back nearly 5200 years for jars and figures from the earliest known civilizations of the Near East and Egypt. From classical Greece, preeminent among the ancient Mediterranean cultures for its ceramics, come striking vases

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ornamented with bold black and red figure painting or rarer fine line drawings against a white background. A lekythos or oil flask depicts the Greek myth of fleet Atalanta's races in lively yet delicate detail. One of only three known surviving white-ground vessels decorated by Douris, a fifth-century Athenian master, it is a particularly prized piece in the classical collection, one of the Museum's most important.

Throughout the Islamic world potters drew on indigenous and foreign sources for their work. Near Eastern glassmaking or metalworking traditions may have prompted the technique, perfected by the twelfth century, of decorating clay pots with a shimmering metallic lustre. Imported Chinese porcelains inspired the elegant forms and gleaming, jewel-like colors of sixteenth-century Iznik pottery. The World of Ceramics displays accomplished products of the major Islamic centers of lustre painting, including their offshoots in Moorish Spain, as well as a splendid Iznik mosque lamp.

In sixteenth-century Italian towns such as Faenza, Deruta, and Gubbio maiolica, a popular earthenware, flourished. A tin-based opaque white glaze provided artists with smooth surfaces ideal for painting colorful designs and narrative scenes on plates and vessels. To former director William M. Milliken the Museum owes the depth of its maiolica collection. For wealthy patrons, Italian artists also produced large scale ceramic sculptures and reliefs to adorn churches or palaces. Giovanni della Robbia's graceful figure of a woman representing Plenty is such a work. Bernard Palissy and the anonymous St. Porchaire master, French potters of the sixteenth century, made highly individualistic, even fantastic, ornamental pieces.

The World of Ceramics also includes some of the rare early European attempts to imitate Chinese blue and white porcelain with "soft-paste" mixtures of finely ground glass and clay. Sumptuously decorated tureens from the royal French

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factories at Vincennes and Sèvres represent the art of soft-paste porcelain at its highest degree of refinement. The discovery of European deposits of kaolin, the pure, fine-grained, white clay which makes porcelain, hastened the development during the eighteenth-century, particularly at the Meissen factory in Germany, of true hard-paste porcelain.

While Islamic and European potters strove, with the support of caliphs and kings, for the refined elegance of porcelain, cultures in the New World were modeling and polishing earthenware. An excellent example is a forceful, expressive seated figure from the Zapotec culture in what is now Mexico. Native American Indian traditions experienced a revival in the twentieth century, most notably in the impressive blackware of Maria Martinez.

The ceramic art of China is unparalleled for its beauty, elegance, and technical achievement. The World of Ceramics features nearly all of the major Chinese wares and types, from the Neolithic period to the eighteenth century, drawing on a strong collection that had its beginning in gifts from early donors and has been enriched considerably under the guidance of current director Sherman E. Lee. Throughout their long history, Chinese potters perfected the art of monochrome glazing in white Ting wares and green glazed celadons from the Sung Dynasty, imperial yellow Ming Dynasty wares, and the peach-bloom, ox-blood, and blanc de chine porcelains of the Ch'ing Dynasty. Decorated Chinese wares are also celebrated, from T'ang Dynasty tomb figures to Blue and White porcelains of the Yüan and Ming Dynasties and enameled vases of the Ming and Ch'ing Dynasties.

The most distinctively Japanese ceramics are the bowls, water jars, platform tiles, and serving dishes associated with the Buddhist tea taste ceremony which gained hold in Japan in the sixteenth century. One of the few early water jars in a collection outside Japan epitomizes the deliberate roughness cultivated by

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Japanese potters. The Severance A. and Greta Millikin collection of Oriental ceramics, a gift to the Museum with life interest reserved, is particularly strong in later Japanese Arita wares of the Imari, Kakiemon, and Nabeshima types. Eighteen objects from the Millikin collection are a significant addition to The World of Ceramics.

A comprehensive catalog of 176 pages contains 177 black and white photographs and 16 color plates, handsomely illustrating each of the objects in the exhibition. A preface by Jenifer Neils, an introduction by Sherman Lee, and informative entries by fourteen scholars make up the volume. This large format paperback can be purchased at the Museum Bookstore for \$10.00 (including sales tax) and through Indiana University Press for \$19.95.

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For additional information or photographs, please contact the Public Relations Office, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340.